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MILITARY NEWS



Army's McMaster talks about the human domain of war at USF conference



Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster is director of the Army Capabilities and Integration Center and Deputy Commanding General at the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command. Photo from Army Capabilities Integration Center.

By Howard Altman | Tribune Staff 

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Assigned the task of helping the Army divine future wars and how to win them, Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, who sports a doctorate degree in military history, likes to quote authors and academics to explain his job.

Director of the Army Capabilities and Integration Center and Deputy Commanding General at the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, McMaster quotes Ray Bradbury to make a point about military deterrence. He quotes C. Vann Woodward to explain the precarious situation the U.S. finds itself in these days in a very complex world. And he quotes Sir Michael Howard to show why it is important to look ahead at conflicts yet to be.

Bradbury, for instance, was not trying to predict the future with *Fahrenheit 451*, his novel about a totalitarian state, says McMaster, who will be in Tampa tomorrow to speak at the University of South Florida's [Global Initiative on Civil Society and Conflict](#).

"Hell no," McMaster quotes the author. "I'm trying to prevent it."

And in a world in which the U.S. no longer enjoys the "free security" afforded by two vast oceans, a concept he attributes to Woodward, McMaster says his job is to help prevent the

future from turning ugly

McMaster brought up Bradbury to highlight the importance of ground forces, especially at a time when defense spending is being cut while the threat matrix facing the U.S. is becoming increasingly dangerous and complex.

"I am very concerned," says McMaster, about the future in a world in which the Islamic State is slaughtering thousands in Iraq and Syria, where more than a hundred thousand Syrians have died during a multi-faceted civil war, where Boko Haram and al-Shabab are creating havoc in Africa, Yemen is unraveling, Iran remains a malign global influence, Russia has invaded Ukraine, the Chinese are flexing their muscles in Asia, the North Koreans always remain a dangerous wildcard, Pakistan and India are nuclear-armed adversaries, and the Israel-Palestinian conflict can erupt again in a flash.

And those are just the challenges we know about.

"You are seeing the harbingers of future conflict," says McMaster. "The future is difficult or impossible to predict with precision, but not impossible to imagine."

And this, says McMaster, is where Bradbury's quote about trying to prevent a dire future comes into play,

"One of the key things I worry about is that people may undervalue the important deterrent factor quality of land forces," he says. "In our army, one of the reasons that we try to imagine future war is to prevent future war."

McMaster points to Russia as an example.

"Really, what Russia has done to wage limited war with limited objectives is a strong argument to array land forces in sufficient scale" to serve as "a deterrent."

But land forces alone are not the answer, says McMaster, citing Islamic State, which has "been pretty effective in gaining control of populations and land area" despite having no navy or air force.

American military power is "joint power," says McMaster, relying on being able to fight on land, sea, in the air, in space and in the cyber domain.

"War is rock, paper, scissors," he says. "We don't go to war with just one or other..., we have to be able to operate across all domains,"



The first step in understanding potential threats, says McMaster, is understanding what is known as the human domain - how people act and interact.

And that's the reason why he is coming to Tampa.

McMaster, tabbed as one of Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential People last year, will be talking about "The Importance of the Human Domain" during his conversation at USF with Derek Harvey, a retired Army colonel and former Defense Intelligence Agency senior intelligence analyst who now serves as director of the Global Initiative on Civil Society and Conflict.

"What we have to do is really develop the ability to think clearly about future war," says McMaster, who served in both Afghanistan and Iraq and at U.S. Central Command at MacDill Air Force Base as director of the Commander's Advisory Group from 2003 to 2004 "And what we have to do is identify changes in the so-called human domain and understand what is

fundamentally driving conflict, which is human in nature.”

The Army, says McMaster, has to develop that understanding “from the ground up” by building partnerships, training and educating leaders, answering and asking the right questions and “pushing understanding.”

All those lines of effort, “are difficult to do from a standoff range,” says McMaster, explaining the Army’s need to remain globally engaged.

U.S. teams are now in Iraq, working with international partners on understanding the current human domain, says McMaster. But the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the ongoing fight against Islamic State which has seen the hardening of Sunni-Shia sectarian strife, are proof, says McMaster, of how difficult a task that is.

“I think we had a hard time understanding it,” says McMaster of the human domain. “You never completely understand it. The situations are so complex.”

There is a cost, says McMaster, “to developing and sustaining a high degree of situational awareness against a very adaptive enemy in a complex environment.”

But there are often greater costs, says McMaster, for a lack of awareness.

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Which brings McMaster to Sir Michael Howard, a WWII veteran and retired British military historian, who taught at both Oxford and Yale.

No one, says McMaster, can precisely predict the character of the next war.

“But the key is, as Sir Michael Howard said, ‘to not be so far off the mark that it becomes impossible to adjust once that character is revealed,’” says McMaster.

Staying on the mark requires effort, commitment and funding. Generals, says McMaster, are charged with giving their best advice to the civilian leadership. But they don’t call the shots on how much money Congress allocates for the military.

“The American people get the Army they are willing to pay for,” he says. “Our job is to do the best we can with the resources we get.”

There are no shortcuts, he says, to preparing for “a future war against a broad range of adversaries. We know we can’t substitute technology in a way that is directly transferable to manpower. We know for sure that we can’t develop some magical leap ahead in technology that will solve problems.”

Even understanding the human domain is no panacea, he says. It’s one thing to know the players, but it is something else entirely to rely on them.

“You can’t overly rely on partners or proxy interests not often aligned with us,” he says.

“People want an easy solution,” says McMaster. “I worry about self-delusion. That we will grasp at appealing, but fundamentally flawed and simple answers to future war, and, as a result, place future missions and soldiers at much greater risk.”

McMaster’s lecture begins at 1:30 p.m. in the TECO Ballroom located in USF’s College of Education. It’s free and open to the public. For more information, go to <http://www.usfglobalinitiative.org/features/upcoming-event-the-global-initiative-hosts-lt-gen-h-r-mcmaster/>.

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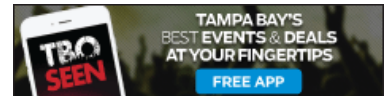
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